

Specials — spinach — black coffee — stewed fruit — the treadmill — the whole awful round. Kid gloves and a check. Why Will was right! She wasn't young any more. She was middle-aged and tired. She hated diets and exercise—that was for younger bodies than hers. Will's voice broke into her train of thought:

"I guess I'll change for church, dear. I'll be ready in about half an hour. Are you going to change?"

"I'll be up in a minute dear. I have some things to tell Grace."

Will left the breakfast room, and Molly soon heard him go up the stairs whistling in high good humor. She went guiltily towards the kitchen, and peeked her head through the swinging door.

"Grace," she whispered happily, "make me some waffles, will you? And bring me some sugar and cream for my coffee. I'm forty today, you know."

"Very good, Madame," said Grace.

mr. pomroy goes out

by
louise dauner

It wasn't a particularly nice afternoon. In the park, the sooty statues, the soggily dripping fountains, the worn sagging benches all contributed to the note of fall depression.

Mr. Pomroy sank deeper into his red leather morris chair. Covertly, his bright blue eyes glanced from his new mystery book to note the moving hands of the massive, gold-embossed clock in the corner. They traveled slowly but inevitably, toward the hour of three.

At precisely the same moment, Mrs. Pomroy raised her head from her

book, to peer majestically through her lorgnette, at the clock, then in the direction of her husband.

"James!" said Mrs. Pomroy.

"Yes, my dear." With a faint but unmistakable sigh.

"Its time for Flossie's afternoon walk."

Abruptly, Mr. Pomroy rose. "Why doesn't she go once in a while?" he thought resentfully. "Always telling someone else what to do!"

Mr. Pomroy didn't know it, but his polite submissiveness had almost reached the breaking point. That he, James Pomroy, successful retired business man, should have degenerated into, or been relegated to, the office of Exerciser-in-Chief to a fuzzy white poodle dog!

Mr. Pomroy gave an extra and quite superfluous tweak to the conservative dark blue silk four-in-hand that reposed on his immaculate wing collar. He flipped a non-existent speck of dust from his left coat lapel, and settled his soft black hat firmly on his head. He loved that hat; its flappy nonchalance made him feel just a little rakish and devilish. (But all the time, deep down in his heart, he knew that he was only a staid and conventional old man.) And then he picked up the leash that curtailed Flossie's impatient cavortings.

"Have a nice walk, dear," said Mrs. Pomroy indulgently, as he went out.

As the front door closed, with just the suggestion of a slam, Mrs. Pomroy returned complacently to her book. First, however, with quiet appreciation she observed the imposing elegance of her black velvet tea-gown; the unimpeachable smoothness of one white, fleshy boneless hand. This pose would make quite a nice oil portrait, she reflected. She must get in touch with that new artist—Peacock—wasn't that his name? She heard he was very good.

Mr. Pomroy betook himself dully along the regular route to the park. He was in a dangerous mood. More

acutely than ever, he saw himself as a quite ridiculous and inadequate figure. Was it for this that he had labored through long years, striving to lay by enough money to live comfortably, but not pretentiously, when he should have reached his present age?

Mr. Pomroy was not aware of the presence of another person, until he looked down from his blank abstraction to see Flossie rapturously sniffing at a pair of slender ankles that had appeared on her horizon. He looked up then, to meet a clear gaze and a smiling appreciation. A young woman bent down for a moment to ruffle the soft white hair.

"What a cute dog!" she observed spontaneously.

"Oh, do you think so?" inquired the dog's guardian a little bitterly.

"Yes. Of course. Don't you?"

"I guess dogs are alright in the abstract. But in the concrete, or rather—on the concrete—!"

The young woman laughed. "Of course puns like that are unforgivable," she said. "But I get your point."

"A nice person," thought Mr. Pomroy. "She's—genuine." Mr. Pomroy respected genuineness. He saw so little of it as a rule.

"So you don't enjoy your present role," she continued sympathetically.

"Enjoy it." He sputtered, on the verge of an explosive elucidation of the point. But he checked himself in time. What business had he to unburden his soul to a total stranger, and a young and attractive woman at that?

But the devil undoubtedly had him in tow that afternoon. And after all, sympathy was rare in Mr. Pomroy's atmosphere.

"Well, you see," he explained, "when a man's worked hard, been active all his life, exercising the family dog can hardly be regarded as a major reason for existing."

The young woman chuckled. "I quite agree with you," she said. "What shall we do about it?"

Mr. Pomroy gasped. These young people nowadays were certainly audacious—and unpredictable. What should they do about it, indeed?

"Why—er—" he stammered. But the idea took root. It grew and flourished. He had been so settled, so dependable, and so tired of his nicely planned routine—Why shouldn't they do something about it?

"Let's go somewhere and have tea," he suggested. And shuddered at his own daring and rakishness.

For a moment his companion regarded him quizzically and keenly, from a pair of bright gray eyes. The result of her cogitation must have been satisfactory, however.

"Lets!" she said decisively. And falling into step with him, she propelled him gently and firmly down the street.

"Good afternoon, Miss Stevens." The waitress greeted the young woman cordially. Tea, as usual?

"I think so." She glanced questioningly at Mr. Pomroy.

"Yes, tea. Two teas," returned that gentleman, and for no reason at all, found himself laughing.

"They seem to know you here," he observed.

"Oh yes. I come in every day about this time. You see I have a studio just around the corner. I'm a commercial artist," she explained.

"An artist! Oh."

Mr. Pomroy's mind skipped back forty-five years. An artist. He had wanted to be an artist once. But his father, a practical American business man, had laughed uproariously at the idea. No bohemian immoral sort of existence for any son of his! Let him get into a steady dependable business that would earn him a living! And so Mr. Pomroy's dreams were stored in his mental attic, as his rough boyish sketches had been stacked in his dusty attic at home.

But he had never succeeded in quite killing the dream. It always popped up again. And once in a while, when

he could evade the afternoon walk, he would steal away for a ramble through the Art Institute. The people there grew quite accustomed to the immaculate old gentleman who would stand for minutes, wistfully regarding some fine old master painting.

"I wanted to be an artist once," he said softly.

"You did? Well, why weren't you?"

"I went into the leather business instead."

"Which was more remunerative, but not nearly so satisfying." She smiled gently.

"Yes." Mr. Pomroy regarded the young woman appreciatively. An unusual person, he decided. She knew things without being told. He liked her—immensely.

"Wouldn't you like to see my studio sometime?" she asked suddenly.

"Why—I'd love to! But, you know"

"Of course! And for a respected retired business man to allow himself to be picked up by a strange woman, about whom he knows nothing—not even her name—" She smiled roguishly, and Mr. Pomroy shuddered faintly. It did sound bad. What if Molly knew?

"But that only adds an intriguing element of mystery, don't you think?" she added brightly.

And Mr. Pomroy nodded in delighted assent.

Too fast the minutes sped by. Glancing out of the window, Mr. Pomroy saw that, to his consternation, it was almost dark.

"I must be getting back," he said hurriedly. Molly will be wondering what's become of me—But its been very nice."

"Oh, but of course! It has been nice. I hope you don't think me a terribly forward young thing!"

"My dear," Mr. Pomroy suddenly felt quite serious. "I think you're quite the loveliest person I've met for a long long time."

"Even if I did practically kidnap

you and drag you off?" she returned gaily. "Well, don't forget. I'll expect you! The Picadilly, Apt. 1, any afternoon....Diane Stevens" she added. "And you are—?"

"James Pomroy," said that gentleman.

"Goodbye, Mr. Pomroy—and thank you!" She waved affectionately at him.

Mr. Pomroy hurried out of the tea-room. He had been gone an hour and a half? What would Molly say? He felt slightly uneasy, and unusually, vibrantly, alive.

During the ensuing days, it never penetrated Mrs. Pomroy's sanguine domesticity that the dreaded hour of three o'clock had ceased to hold any terrors for Mr. Pomroy's gentle soul. But perhaps she never knew that it ever had!

At any rate, at three o'clock, Mr. Pomroy stepped across the threshold of another world. A world where he could lean back and blow beautiful lazy smoke-rings, (Mrs. Pomroy never permitted him to smoke in the house these days); where he could even prop his feet up, if he chose, or recline, full-length, in undignified but luxurious comfort, on Diane's studio couch. Sometimes she did not even stop working. And then he was content to simply watch in fascinated silence. But sometimes they talked—of the little sacred sweet absurd fancies that had been locked tight in Mr. Pomroy's heart all these years.

But finally, inevitably, appeared the fly in the ointment. Rather a large fly, in fact, for it appeared in the person of Mrs. Pomroy herself.

"James," she announced one afternoon, "I believe I'll go with you today."

Mr. Pomroy started slightly beneath his overcoat. "Why of course, my dear" he said. "But its a bit cold today."

"Oh I don't mind in the least" returned his spouse cheerfully. "You know my doctor advises me to reduce,

and walking is such good exercise, he says."

"Damn!" thought Mr. Pomroy. He had planned to go to Diane's for tea. But of course there was nothing to be done about it.

Slowly the Pomroys and Flossie walked down the street. Slowly, inevitably, they came abreast of Diane's apartment. It was hard for Mr. Pomroy not to look around, but he managed to walk nearly past with unturned head. And then, with a joyful yelp, Flossie ran up to the studio door. Before Mr. Pomroy realized it, Diane had flung wide the door.

"Hello there! Come right in," she called. "I'm all ready for you."

The next instant she realized that Mr. Pomroy was not alone. That, in fact, Mr. Pomroy was in the company of the one person who should not have been there. But it was too late to undo the damage. With a long-drawn "Oh," of swift enlightenment, Mrs. Pomroy saw it all.

"Oh James!" she wailed. She cast one stricken glance into the studio. It was, all too plainly, an art studio. With that glance, injured pride, outraged respectability, rose up in all their majestic dignity. Mrs. Pomroy associated nude women, immorality, the worst aspects of bohemianism, with art.

"James Pomroy! That you, of all people, should be having an—an affair! And with this—female!" Mrs. Pomroy exploded with a fizzing sound like a large fire-cracker.

"But Molly—" Mr. Pomroy faltered.

"Don't you 'but Molly' me!" snorted his outraged spouse. "You come straight home! And as for you—you," she could think of nothing adequate, so she glared at Diane with a malevolent eye, "I'll settle with you later!"

With a dramatic flourish, Mrs. Pomroy gathered together her skirts and sailed full-blown back up the street.

Behind her, in sullen crestfallen silence, Mr. Pomroy and Flossie walked drearily home. And if Mr. Pomroy tweaked the leash a bit vehemently, he must be forgiven. After all, it was all Flossie's doing!

death in the evening

by

john thompson

I died last night. The doctor sat in the big oak host chair (borrowed from the dining room) and rubbed his chin and said that he couldn't understand that high temperature. Mother and dad and the two kid brothers crammed themselves into my little bedroom and stood looking on—not overly interested or concerned. I had been sick before.

They all talked about the doctor's son, who played on the same high school football team with my brothers; and about whether it was advisable to rush a boy into a decision on his life's work in order to get him right into college—then suddenly the doctor remembered that I was the one he had come to see. He said that there they were, all talking about his boy, Henry, and football and such, when I was lying there dying.

So you see, I'm not kidding—I have the doctor's word for it.

But the peculiar thing about it is that none of them know just when it happened; not even the doctor. Although he realized, in a sort of technical manner, that I was passing away, if you were to ask him today, just when I died, he wouldn't know. He might say anything to cover up his ignorance. He might even say that